

As the Weed Grows, So Do the Apprehensions of Residents on Lower Chandler Mill Pond

By Kimberley Keyes

Residents of the homes that surround Lower Chandler Mill Pond face the summer with growing apprehension. The light-colored flecks that now dot the pond's surface do not stop enthusiasts from boating and fishing. Sunfish, pickerel and bass are plentiful.

But, by mid-June, the dots will have grown into full-fledged weeds so thick a canoe's paddle can hardly cut through them.

"A couple of weeks and they'll be there," promised Lake Shore Drive resident Charles Zisko, a self-employed financial planner whose house sits next to the pond.

The weeds, called fanwort, grow from the bottom to cover the 39-acre pond from June to November. Their presence effectively prohibits summer recreation on the pond, which is shared by Duxbury and Pembroke.

Waterfront residents are left with little more enjoyment than a view of the surroundings.

"In mid-summer, nobody's out there," said Zisko's wife, Gwynne, a lawyer and homemaker. "If the water's low and the weeds are high, it smells bad. There are a lot of bugs.... People tend to stay away."

It was not always so. Many of the houses on Lake Shore Drive, which gently slopes and winds its way along the Duxbury side of Lower Chandler Mill Pond, were built in the 1950s as vacation homes.

Gwynne Zisko, whose family moved to their house three years ago, said neighbors have fond memories of their kids swimming in the pond. Now, she said, "you wouldn't want to, with all the weeds."



By mid-June, the pond's now-beautiful surface will be choked with weeds almost too thick for a canoe's paddle to cut through them.

The non-native fanwort, which is often seen in home aquariums, could have been introduced into the man-made pond through water fowl or boat trailers, the Ziskos said.

Locals first approached the Duxbury Conservation Commission about four years ago for help in dealing with the fanwort,

said Joe Grady, the town's conservation administrator.

In response, the town hired Fugro East, a Northborough-based consultant, to conduct an environmental study of the pond.



Brian Golden and Rick Servant, both of Pembroke, fish on Lower Chandler Mill Pond.

The consultant recommended using the herbicide Sonar AS, containing fluridone, to eradicate the fanwort.

Grady said the town planned to hire Aquatic Control Technologies, Inc., also of Northborough, to disperse the herbicide. In anticipation, town meeting voters in Duxbury and Pembroke this year appropriated \$10,000 each for the project. It is expected to cost between \$16,000 and \$20,000.

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— Gwynne Zisko, pond resident

Sonar would be sprayed underwater to attack the fanwort. It is considered to have low toxicity to invertebrates, fish, other aquatic wildlife, and humans," according to Fugro's report.

Its effect on cranberry bogs, however, is unknown — and since there are several bogs located downstream from the pond, Aquatic Control Technologies has decided it won't spray until it knows what could happen to the cranberries, Grady said.

Sonar's manufacturer, SePro Corp., advised against using the chemical within one mile of a cranberry bog. But two weeks ago,

Continued on Page 18



Walter Amory readies his Alden ocean shell for a Sunday cruise around the bay.

Staff Photo by Chris Benson

Pond

Continued from Page 17

Grady learned the manufacturer recommends doubling the distance to two miles. Grady said he did not know why but said he imagined it's "because they're concerned."

Spraying the herbicide this summer is unlikely, he said. It appears the fanwort will grow unchecked for at least another season.

The news crushed the hopes of residents like the Ziskos, who lobbied officials in both towns to support their cause and convinced voters to fund it.

"We feel discouraged because we were so close," Charles Zisko said.

"We thought this is what we were going to see all summer," Gwynne Zisko added, gesturing toward the unfettered pond.

But while Grady waits for Aquatic Control Technologies' verdict on the bogs, plans to lower the pond's water level by two feet continue.

The so-called "drawdown" was another recommendation by

Fugro to control the fanwort.

Grady said it would entail removing the boards that dam the pond and leaving them out from Dec. 1 to Feb. 28. The resulting freeze and thaw of the pond's mud would limit the weed's growth, he said.

Drawdown will require surveys of the pond's plant and wildlife species, both before and after the water level is reduced, said Grady. He said the project will probably cost between \$10,000 and \$20,000.

Money is available for the drawdown. In addition to this year's appropriation, Duxbury town meeting voters approved \$10,000 last year.

Charles Zisko praised Grady and Duxbury selectmen, whom he said deserve a pat on the back for their efforts to help solve the pond's fanwort problem. Gwynne Zisko remains optimistic that their efforts will pay off someday.

"Hopefully," she said, "we wait one more year and it's done."